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Introduction

Little Stories of the Great War: Ohioans in World War I, a Foundations grant to plan for a statewide digital collection of World War I (WWI) resources commemorating Ohio's role in the conflict, was completed by the Ohio History Connection (OHC) in April 2016 with funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). *Little Stories of the Great War* had two primary goals:

Goal 1: Develop a plan to build a comprehensive, statewide digital collection of WWI materials.

Objective: Identify representative collections from within the OHC holdings as well as cultural heritage institutions from around the state through a statewide collections survey.

Objective: Create a union bibliography of significant WWI resources in the state.

Objective: Develop and apply selection criteria to identify items for future digitization.

Goal 2: Increase access to and use of scholarly and primary source materials related to WWI.

Objective: Develop a digital collection prototype that utilizes collections identified through the statewide collections survey.

Objective: Identify educator curriculum plans, as they relate to the commemoration of WWI, through a statewide educator survey.

Over the course of this one-year planning grant, the Digital Services Department of OHC accomplished all major activities as laid out in the grant proposal for *Little Stories of the Great War*. These included the establishment of an advisory board to advise and inform the project; the development of a statewide collections survey and two Ohio educator surveys; the creation of an online union bibliography documenting research collections in the state; and the building of a digital collection to share primary WWI resources with the public online.

Activities and Methodology

Advisory Board

Prior to beginning the grant, project staff had secured letters of commitment from selected advisory board members, who were convened for the first of three meetings in June 2015. Subsequent meetings took place in October 2015 and March 2016, during which the advisory board provided critical guidance and input on the project and its outcomes. Examples of advisory board input include:

- drafting and disseminating both the statewide collections survey and the two educator surveys;
- developing selection criteria for materials to be digitized;
- selection of a prototype collection for digitization from the holdings of OHC and an organization identified from the statewide collections survey;
- planning for educational resources to improve usage of the digital collection; and
- selection of materials to digitize in future phases of the project.

The advisory board provided expertise from a variety of perspectives, and members included staff from cultural heritage organizations, scholars on the subject of WWI, and K-12 and post-secondary educational professionals. A strong partnership was developed between project staff and advisory board members, with the majority having confirmed their willingness to continue in this capacity as the project evolves.

They have also provided ongoing communication about how the project may be shared more broadly, resulting in potential publicity efforts at future conferences and symposiums.

Collections Survey

Early in the project, with the aforementioned assistance from the advisory board and consultation with evaluation and research firm Garrett Consulting, project staff developed and administered three surveys. Creation of these surveys involved an iterative process whereby project staff shared an initial set of questions with Garrett consultants outlining the desired information, questions were finalized and put into hard copy and online formats, and survey logic was tested by project staff and advisory board members to ensure that respondents were taken through an appropriate set of questions depending on their individual circumstances. Advisory board feedback was critical throughout the revising stages of the surveys to confirm that information was solicited in a way that these audiences would understand, and to be sure that the information collected would serve the ultimate goals of the project. Once questions and survey logic were finalized and approved, a final web presence was generated for dissemination of the surveys to their respective audiences.

The first survey was distributed to cultural heritage organizations of all types throughout the state of Ohio, including historical societies, libraries, community archives, educational institutions, museums and more. The survey inquired as to whether the institution in question held primary or secondary source material related to WWI and its impact on Ohio. Responses to this survey allowed for further follow up by email to learn more about these collections, for final inclusion in the union bibliography. Most data was collected via SurveyMonkey, although some hardcopy surveys were distributed through the postal service. Each institution contacted as part of this process received a unique survey link, ensuring that the final analysis of responses could be managed efficiently and respondent types could be easily and effectively grouped and sorted for interpretation.

In terms of identifying WWI collections around Ohio—a major objective of the project in preparation for future efforts—the original statewide collections survey was distributed to 836 institutions from a master list. This allowed project staff to reach cultural heritage organizations of all sizes and types in order to cast as broad a net as possible, and helped to ensure that this project served to improve access to valuable research collections that might otherwise remain largely undiscovered.

This project allowed OHC staff to gain practical experience in collecting, analyzing and presenting information sourced from a large number of diverse institutions across the state. One of the primary challenges of administering the surveys was developing the distribution lists. For the statewide collections survey, project staff relied on preexisting lists developed by statewide professional organizations, such as the Ohio Public Library Information Network, the Ohio Local History Alliance and the Society of Ohio Archivists, as a starting point to identify which institutions should be surveyed. Particularly with smaller cultural heritage institutions, it was sometimes difficult to find updated contact information as some of them do not have email addresses or web presences. The primary method of survey distribution was electronic, but for institutions that did not provide an email address, hardcopy surveys were printed and mailed so that they could also be included. As organizations increase their digital footprints, surveys of this type in the future will be easier to administer. Although the survey had an acceptable return rate and allowed project staff to gather the information needed to achieve project objectives, additional participation from external stakeholders would have strengthened the resources created. Because new items can be added to the bibliography, however, project staff expect that more institutions will send information to be included as the project continues and is promoted over the next several years as part of the WWI centennial.

Educator Surveys

The second set of surveys were distributed to K-12 and post-secondary educators to find out what topics they taught in their curriculum related to WWI, and to gather suggestions and insight about what kinds of supplementary educational resources would enhance student and teacher usage of the digital collection. Project staff had initially developed one survey for both sets of educators, but on the recommendation of the advisory board, two separate versions were developed to ascertain the same information from these two different educational levels. This ensured that project staff learned valuable information from audiences with diverse needs and expectations for a digital collection and accompanying educational resources. Data from these surveys was collected exclusively via SurveyMonkey using a universal link.

A total of 104 responses to these two educator surveys informed the selection criteria laid out for current and future digitization, and helped with planning for educational resources that will be developed as part of the implementation phase of the project. One key lesson learned is that post-secondary educators are mainly interested in access to the primary resources themselves but prefer to create their own educational plans. K-12 educators, on the other hand, expressed great interest in prepared lesson plans and other educational resources related to the digital material. Consequently, the implementation phase of this project will involve the development of K-12 teaching tools geared toward this community.

The educator surveys presented challenges as well because there are no comprehensive lists of educator email addresses publicly available. Project staff again worked with statewide professional organizations, such as the Ohio Department of Education, the Ohio Council for the Social Studies and the Ohio Academy of History, relying on their newsletters, listservs and other electronic communications to distribute survey links to K-12 and postsecondary educators. As with the collections survey, additional participation from external stakeholders would have strengthened the resources created.

Union Bibliography

Based on the extensive feedback provided by cultural heritage institutions to the statewide collections survey, project staff contacted respondents to learn more concrete information about the relevant collections they wished to have listed on the bibliography. A Google form was created to solicit the required information about each collection and its holding institution, a link to which was distributed by email. For institutions who could not, for various reasons, use the Google form, alternate methods of submission were provided, including spreadsheets and links to catalog records. The information collected was compiled on a master list, which was then edited for accuracy and consistency and uploaded to an online SQL database that was then made publically available as a searchable webpage at <http://www.ohiohistoryhost.org/wwibib/>. Users can browse collections by a predetermined vocabulary of topics, regions and formats, or perform a keyword search to find relevant holdings. Each collection record includes information provided by the holding institution, as well as contact information about the organization itself should they wish to view the materials in person or learn more. It is planned that this resource will also be shared as a downloadable/printable PDF that will be available from the bibliography homepage linked above. In this format, libraries and other institutions will be able to maintain a hard copy that users can browse in person to identify local or remote collections of interest.

From those 836 survey recipients referenced in the Collections Survey section, preliminary responses were received from 140 organizations. Following up with those who indicated that they held relevant resources, and who wished to have their holdings included on the bibliography, resulted in a total list of 261 different collections from 49 organizations. Within the OHC collections, project staff identified approximately 120 relevant WWI collections, 20 of which are currently listed on the union bibliography because of their significant research value, with more to be added.

It is anticipated that the number of collections (both OHC and non-OHC) included in the bibliography will continue to grow as users and institutions are made more aware of the resource and the attention it can draw to otherwise “hidden” collections. While the union bibliography was used in part to evaluate and plan for the digitization of a significant portion of these original materials as part of a future implementation phase of the project, its primary value will be as an access point for researchers to identify and locate relevant WWI collections, making these materials known beyond the walls of their holding institutions. Since the publication of the resource in late April 2016, project staff have received email contact from six participating organizations with new and updated information about collections which they would like to have listed for researchers to discover. While no new organizations have yet reached out in this way, project staff anticipate that broader dissemination of the bibliography will result in new organizations interested in participating. For example, a presentation on the project at the Society of Ohio Archivists Annual Conference on May 20, 2016, resulted in further conversations about relevant collections to be added from institutions who had not previously provided information for the bibliography.

Digital Collection

The final principal activity accomplished during the project is the pilot digital collection of primary WWI resources, the *World War I in Ohio Digital Collection*, which is freely available online through Ohio Memory at www.ohiomemory.org/cdm/wwi. In addition to sharing valuable historical content upon the completion of the planning grant, this pilot helped to establish workflows for and evaluate the sustainability of the future full-scale digitization project. With input from the advisory board, one collection was chosen from the OHC archives for digitization, and one participant, the North Canton Heritage Society (NCHS), was chosen from a list of respondents to the statewide collections survey. NCHS was selected because their collection documented the name change the town underwent (New Berlin to North Canton) during the war in response to widespread anti-German sentiment.

Material was scanned from both OHC and NCHS collections on-site at the Ohio History Center by project staff, and metadata was applied to ensure that the items in the digital collection include all necessary information to remain searchable and useable beyond the end date of the project, and available to the widest possible audience. Both digitization and metadata creation followed the current standards and best practices laid out in the original project proposal, resulting in sustainable digital content which can be used for access, display, exhibition and research purposes without requiring additional handling of the originals in the future. Technical specifications for digitization include a minimum of 600 DPI, 24-bit color depth and creation of master TIFF files, in accordance with current digitization best practices. Digital content was made available through Ohio Memory, a CONTENTdm repository, and described using the Qualified Dublin Core metadata schema.

Since the conclusion of the grant, additional collections items held by OHC and a photograph set from NCHS have been added to the *World War I in Ohio Digital Collection*. The collection currently consists of over 400 items representing stories of Ohioans during the war both on the home front and the battlefield. Regardless of potential future funding received, project staff will continue adding OHC content to the collection as we advance through the centennial of the conflict over the coming years.

OHC regularly collects usage statistics on its digital collections using Google Analytics. Data gathered includes number of visits, number of page views, number of users, new versus returning users, location of users and length of visit. The *World War I in Ohio Digital Collection* has not been online long enough to collect and analyze any substantive quantitative data, but over time, OHC will be able to use these

statistics to demonstrate the collection's value to those in and out of Ohio. Similar usage data will also be collected on the union bibliography.

While OHC already has experience managing collaborative digitization projects through Ohio Memory, *Little Stories of the Great War* allowed project staff to gain experience on a more focused project. Previous phases of Ohio Memory included the digitization of collections from all over the state, but current project staff were not involved in those efforts, and Ohio Memory today allows subscribers to digitize, describe and contribute their own materials to Ohio Memory, with support from OHC staff. The *World War I in Ohio Digital Collection* differs from this process in that project staff digitized, described and added the items to Ohio Memory themselves. By including an external participant in the planning phase, staff were able to pilot project documentation and workflow, such as the memorandum of understanding template, transportation of original and digitized materials to and from the participant institution, and turnaround time for scanning, description and upload to Ohio Memory. This process has confirmed that communication with external partners is key to ensure that expectations for both OHC and project participants are clear and that the overall schedule for the project is maintained.

Outcome and Promotion

The activities and accomplishments listed above provide the framework through which OHC will advance the project into a full-scale implementation phase—which was the primary purpose of this planning grant—in the following ways:

- The union bibliography has been used to identify potential project participants with relevant holdings and interest in participating in a statewide collaborative digital collection. Access to the full bibliography is available at www.ohiohistoryhost.org/wwibib/; the resource currently lists over 250 research collections on the topic of WWI, submitted by 49 institutions around the state. This resource will be maintained and updated on an ongoing basis as needed.
- Results from the educator surveys were used to plan for educational resources to be created, and to inform the selection criteria developed with the help of the advisory board to ensure that materials included in the future digital collection are diverse in both content and format.
- The prototype digital collection process informed decisions on documentation, workflow and schedule which will allow project staff to successfully digitize, describe and make available online collections from multiple institutions within a predetermined period for this implementation phase of the project.

With guidance from the advisory board, project staff also accomplished the objective of developing and applying selection criteria to identify future items for digitization. These include five “basic” criteria: historical significance, complementary value, scanning potential, ownership and copyright. In addition, 36 “areas of focus” were designated into which collections should fall, such as anti-German sentiment, manufacturing and industry, aims of WWI, and women. 23 format types, including military records, correspondence, uniforms and equipment, and posters, were identified that project staff hope to have represented in the resulting digital collection.

Additional products that were outcomes of the grant include a comprehensive listing of cultural heritage organizations around the state of Ohio; an agreement used for the pilot digital collection that will allow for partnerships to be established more efficiently during any future phases of the project; a number of identified marketing and outreach opportunities to pursue over the next several years; and options for local, state and national funding sources to support the project's various activities. The achievement of each goal and objective laid out in the original grant proposal has positioned OHC to establish a

comprehensive implementation plan building on the products created over the course of the planning grant, and allowing for support of WWI commemoration and scholarship around Ohio and beyond.

Promotion of the project has been ongoing from its start. Means of publicity have included (and will continue to include) blog posts, conference presentations, sharing at Ohio Local History Alliance and Ohio Digitization Interest Group meetings, articles in various publications such as the *Local Historian* and OHC's membership newsletter *Echoes*, email blasts, listserv announcements, and social media posts.

Audiences

The primary audiences for *Little Stories of the Great War* include researchers with both a personal and professional or scholarly interest in the topic of WWI, and educators and students around the state and beyond. These audiences will be able to both make use of the material in the digital collection, and more easily identify locations for research around the state, thereby increasing visitation to and usage of collections at institutions throughout Ohio that are participating in the union bibliography.

Users with relatives who participated in WWI may seek photographs, letters, diaries, journals and military records about their family members—items which help to shed light on the personal experiences of soldiers abroad and civilians at home. Researchers in a variety of fields (military history and otherwise) can also find resources of tremendous value in the stories told about the home front experience in Ohio, Ohio's war effort, nationalism and other social and political movements, and more through the collections shared as part of this project. *Little Stories of the Great War* supports the research of these groups by increasing direct access to primary resources through the digital collection, and helping them locate research collections of interest around the state through the searchable union bibliography.

Another primary audience for this project includes both K-12 and post-secondary educators and students. Current K-12 statewide curriculum standards encourage the use of primary sources to learn a variety of subjects, such as history, literature, science and geography. Information gathered through the educator surveys has demonstrated that the resources shared in this project and potential future iterations will be of great use to teachers and professors who wish to engage their classes with primary resources on a topic that resonates both globally and locally. As the digital collection and union bibliography continue to grow, these resources will allow for closer relationships to form with the educators who provided such valuable feedback and insight through the statewide educator surveys. Many teachers and professors indicated strong interest in putting to use the resources available in their classrooms, and may serve as future sources of ideas for developing and distributing educational resources to accompany the digital content that is already shared.

The planned implementation phase of the project will involve closer collaboration with educators to ensure that the digital content is as useful as possible to its intended audiences, and project staff look forward to nurturing these collaborative relationships. To support these activities, project staff will work closely with colleagues from the OHC Education and Multimedia Services and Local History Services Departments. Their existing relationships with and services for educators of all levels will not only allow for the creation of relevant educational resources, but for the promotion of these resources to the appropriate audiences.

While much of the project was designed with these audiences in mind, the general public, particularly those with an interest in history and their community, are also served by this project. Some OHC WWI collections are available digitally, but many are still only accessible to patrons who visit the Ohio History

Center. Creating a comprehensive digital resource will expand access to the global community, allowing researchers all over the world to find information about their personal history or the history of war and society as impacted by WWI. Similarly, information about the collections that can otherwise be difficult for researchers to find is now shared more widely via the union bibliography. With the 100th anniversary of United States involvement in the war starting in 2017, these types of items will be in even higher demand for researchers, members of the media and others.

So far, informal and anecdotal feedback gathered from stakeholders shows that the public has responded positively to this project. Attendees at a recent conference presentation stated that this was “a valuable project [and] great program” and “a fascinating topic that deserves more attention [and is now getting] the recognition it deserves.” A participant in the union bibliography commented, “Thank you again for creating this incredible resource.”

Conclusion

Little Stories of the Great War was a planning project that has prepared OHC for a larger and more statewide effort to share WWI resources directly with users in Ohio and beyond. The outcomes of this phase have positioned OHC to apply for additional funding both from NEH and alternative sources, as project staff can now identify collections and partners from across the state and use established project workflows to digitize materials that will share Ohio’s many stories on this topic. The surveys created and their resulting responses have also helped to plan for educational resources that will allow for deeper interaction with the current digital collection, as well as the material that will be added in the future. Because project staff have developed a more complete understanding of WWI holdings in both OHC collections and around the state, OHC is much better situated to develop, and obtain financial support for, a full-scale digitization project.

In the meantime, the resulting digital collection and union bibliography will stand on their own as valuable resources for researchers and audiences of varying backgrounds to learn more about Ohio in WWI. Varied viewpoints are included in the historical material that comprise the *World War I in Ohio Digital Collection*, including perspectives both at home and abroad, and the significant domestic impact felt by Ohio residents during the conflict. The union bibliography helps to ensure that research materials are made more discoverable to those users who search for them, and will increase use of these collections by audiences both local and further afield. Because current standards and best practices were followed throughout the project, both resources will continue to have impact long after this and future phases have been achieved.

The successful completion of this project will allow OHC to serve as a leader in the ongoing commemoration efforts related to WWI and the upcoming centennial of United States involvement, and cultural heritage institutions around the state have expressed their interest in participating in future commemorative efforts over the next few years. *Little Stories of the Great War* has positioned OHC to continue its ongoing efforts to champion history in Ohio.